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SUBJECT: CORFU PROCESS SESSION V: IT'S THE CONFLICTS, STUPID

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) The fifth session of the Corfu Process dialogue made clear that the OSCE's ability to provide early warning and prevent, manage and resolve conflict is a key overarching theme in the Corfu process. Most delegations noted that the key stumbling block to the resolution of the protracted conflicts is the lack of collective political will. The U.S. proposal for a new conflict prevention and crisis response mechanism received broad support) with Russia voicing a strong dissent to the possibility of pre-authorized and CiO-dispatched conflict prevention missions. While Russia also argued for agreement on a "unified approach" to conflict resolution, many participating States (pS) highlighted the importance of preserving the OSCE's flexibility and avoiding a "one-size-fits-all" approach. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The fifth session of the Corfu Process dialogue featured two presentations: Conflict Prevention Center (CPC) Director Herbert Salber addressed the topic of conflict resolution in the OSCE area, and High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) Ambassador Knut Vollebaek addressed the links between national minority issues and European security. Both presentations set the stage for a discussion among PermReps on the root causes of conflict in the OSCE, the available OSCE mechanisms to prevent, manage and resolve conflict and the actual experience of protracted and current conflicts in the OSCE area.

¶3. (SBU) Opening the session, Greek Ambassador Marinaki remarked that the OSCE conflict resolution toolbox has proven inadequate, as shown by the organization's failure to adequately prevent the 2008 conflict in Georgia. Ambassador Salber carefully outlined the tools, instruments and mechanisms available in the OSCE, why they are not being fully utilized and how some modest changes could improve the organization's effectiveness. He noted the seeming contradiction in the Helsinki Final Act between the principles of territorial integrity and the right to self-determination, but stressed that in the end it comes down to the political will of the participating States, especially those involved in a conflict, to seek a peaceful solution.

¶4. (SBU) As the first speaker, the U.S. delegation presented a Food for Thought paper on enhancing the capabilities of the Chairperson-in-Office (CiO) to dispatch a small team to monitor developments in potential conflict areas and facilitate dialogue, information flow and humanitarian relief. Many delegations commented favorably on the U.S. paper, calling it "innovative" and a "needed step forward." The Finnish director of policy planning, representing the 2008 CiO, said that had such a mechanism been available during the Georgia conflict, the OSCE might have been able to reduce tensions and prevent the outbreak of hostilities. Russia and Belarus warned against ideas and efforts that might undermine what they see as the OSCE's core strength) its requirement for consensus. Russia also placed

preconditions on the launch of any OSCE mechanism: it must be preceded by wide-ranging consultations with participating States and have the explicit consent of the parties. Ambassador Salber countered these arguments, saying the U.S. concept is in line with other OSCE mechanisms and arguing that its approval and activation would not erode the consensus rule inasmuch as the establishment of the mechanism would necessarily be by consensus.

15. (SBU) Many delegations cited the August 2008 conflict in Georgia as an example of how the organization's conflict prevention and resolution capabilities have eroded over time.

Most attributed the erosion both to the rise of other capable players, including the EU and NATO, and the lack of political will on the part of participating States to find a peaceful resolution to disputes. Russian Ambassador Azimov commented on the "double standards" of some States, which were willing to support Kosovo's independence from Serbia but refused to recognize the independence of the two breakaway territories in Georgia. The Russian delegation did not respond to a later challenge from Albania regarding Russia's own double standards in these two cases.

16. (SBU) A representative of the 2008 Finnish CiO used the lessons learned from the Georgia experience to expound on the OSCE's current strengths and weaknesses in the area of conflict prevention. The OSCE's strengths are its valuable toolbox, consisting primarily of CSBMs and field presences, and the flexibility that permits innovative collaboration with other international organizations. Weaknesses include a consistent inability to respond in a timely fashion to early warning signals; limitations on the activities of field presences coupled with an inability to rapidly augment their staff and resources as needed; and a diminishment of the

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impact of the OSCE's long-term investment in conflict-prone areas. He articulated a vision for the OSCE that defines the organization as a "first responder" and an effective host for conflict resolution efforts, an initiator of international cooperation in its area, and a global model for regional crisis response.

17. (SBU) Russia's intervention highlighted two major OSCE "failures" - to prevent the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the Georgian military aggression in August 2008. Ambassador Azimov advocated the need to agree on a "uniform approach" to conflict resolution. In particular, he argued that we should ensure the consistent application of norms and principles, including the inadmissibility of the use or threat of force; respect for existing conflict resolution and peacekeeping mechanisms; and the protection of the civilian population in conflict zones through the provision of humanitarian assistance and a policy of non-isolation.

18. (SBU) A number of speakers also touched on the Transnistrian and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts, commenting that any lasting solution requires the political will of the parties directly involved to settle their differences peacefully. Moldova urged pS to use the theoretical dialogue within the Corfu process to push for progress in specific cases of conflict, and argued that the settlement process should not be held hostage to biased or ineffective negotiation or peacekeeping mechanisms. Azerbaijan, as it has done in the past, took the opportunity to air its grievances over Nagorno-Karabakh, reiterating its refusal to consider CSBMs with Armenia until Armenia returns all of the occupied territories. Armenia, for its part, emphasized the importance of compromise to dispute settlement and lobbied for the involvement of all parties to a conflict in resolution efforts.

19. (SBU) In his presentation, High Commissioner Vollebaek touched on the threats posed to European security by inter-ethnic conflict and stressed the need to prevent inter-state hostilities over national minority issues. He noted that violations of minority rights and failures to reach accommodation between majorities and minorities have been the main cause of conflicts in the OSCE area. Vollebaek therefore proposed that pS consider adopting a decision codifying some or all of the provisions contained in his 2008

Bolzano Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations.

¶10. (SBU) Responses to this proposal were generally positive, although several pS expressed the fear that the process of turning the High Commissioner,s non-binding recommendations into politically-binding commitments might actually weaken them. Most shared Vollebaek,s concerns about the threat of inter-ethnic conflict and emphasized their support for the early warning and conflict prevention work of the HCNM in this regard. Many delegations called for further strengthening of the OSCE,s capacity for action in the field of national minorities, as part of an overall effort to sharpen the OSCE,s conflict prevention mechanisms.

Russia stressed in particular the need for the HCNM to address the unprecedented problem of mass statelessness, and to focus more attention on States "West of Vienna."

¶11. (C) Comment: Discussion at the fifth session of the Corfu process showed that pS are in broad agreement that conflict prevention and resolution is at the core of the OSCE,s mandate. However, States recognize that one of the OSCE,s main weaknesses is its ability to move from early warning to preventive action. This session provided substance for the continuing discussion of how OSCE can enhance European security. There was broad support - except for Russia and Belarus - for strengthening the OSCE,s conflict prevention capabilities along the lines proposed by the U.S. and Ambassador Salber. Discussion of providing the CiO with pre-authorization to deploy a small mission and other conflict prevention measures should make the list for a continued focus during Corfu discussions at and beyond the Athens Ministerial. End Comment.

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